

MAR 19 1930

# The Classical Weekly

Published on Monday, October 1 to May 31, except in weeks in which there is a legal or School holiday (Election Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Easter Sunday, Decoration Day).  
Place of Publication, Barnard College, New York City. In United States of America, \$2.00 per volume; elsewhere, \$2.50.  
Single numbers, 15 cents each. Address all communications to Charles Knapp, at 1737 Sedgwick Avenue, New York City.  
Entered as second-class matter, November 18, 1907, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at special rate provided for in Section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917, authorized June 28, 1918.

VOL. XXIII, No. 18

MONDAY, MARCH 17, 1930

WHOLE No. 629

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# The Classical Weekly

VOLUME XXIII, No. 18

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## HOMERIC LITOTES<sup>1</sup>

### I. HISTORY OF THE TERM LITOTES

The term *litotes* denotes one of the few rhetorical figures still mentioned by Latin and Greek grammarians of our time. The history of the term may be found in John Leverett Moore's paper, *Servius on the Tropes and Figures of Vergil*, which appeared in *The American Journal of Philology* 12 (1891), and was reprinted separately (Baltimore, 1891). A more detailed history of the term, with a very full list of Latin examples of *litotes*, is given by C. Weyman, in *Jahrbücher für Classische Philologie*, Supplementband 15 (1887).

It is strange that a term which is clearly Greek in origin cannot be traced outside of Latin writers—Servius, Porphyryon, Donatus, and others. The figure itself is noted by Greek rhetoricians and by earlier Latin writers, but they call it by different names. For a long time, too, there was some doubt about the spelling of the word. In the manuscripts of Servius two spellings seem to have been used, *liptotes* and *litotes*. Calepinus (Ambrogio Calepino, the Italian lexicographer [1435-1511]) declares that *liptotes* is a misreading of the manuscripts. Both *liptote* (1589) and *litote* (1645) are given in the New English Dictionary as in early use. After 1600, *liptotes* gradually disappeared. Caussin, *De Eloquentia* (1634), gives both spellings, but expresses a preference for *litotes*.

By the examples given in *Ad Herennium* 4.38 *litotes* may be recognized. The Latin term there is *deminutio*, probably the Latin equivalent of the Greek term *meiosis*. *Deminutio* is defined there as the toning down of a bold statement. The two examples cited involve negatives with the superlative, one of the most common forms of *litotes*: . . . *disciplinam militarem non in postremis tenerem*, ' . . . I did not put military training in the last place . . . ', *non tenuissimum patrimonium reliquit*, ' . . . bequeathed no very slight inheritance '. These are modest statements for 'I put military training very high', and 'I received a very large inheritance '. Cicero refers in a word or two (*De Oratore* 3.202, *Orator* 137) to the same figure, but gives no examples. However, in both cases he mentions the matter in close connection with ridicule and irony. This is significant because in practice *litotes* has been often used in irony. Quintilian (9.2.3) simply quotes Cicero's words.

No Greek writer, so far as a diligent search can show, uses the term *litotes*. Sophocles, in his *Dictionary of Byzantine Greek*, gives references for *λιτότης* in the sense of 'frugality', but does not mention the use of the word to denote a figure of speech. In Liddell and

Scott we have no references for its use to denote a figure. It is declared there to be the same as *meiosis*. The glossaries in Professor Rhys Roberts's editions of Longinus, Demetrius, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus do not mention the term or the thing. Wilkins, on Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.202, gives *ἐξουθενισμός* as the equivalent of *extenuatio*, Cicero's term, and of *deminutio*, the term used in *Ad Herennium* 4.38, when the figurative language is directed against an opponent; he gives *μειωσις* as the equivalent when the language is used of the speaker himself. Ernesti (Johann Christ. Ernesti, *Lexicon Technologiae Graecorum Rhetoricae* [Leipzig, 1795]), gives *ἐξουθενισμός*<sup>2</sup> as the Greek equivalent. Various other terms are used by the Greek rhetoricians to indicate *litotes*, as will be shown presently.

A species of *ἥθος* ('estimable personality', 'estimable character'), which is one of the leading *ideal* of Hermogenes, *Περὶ Ἰδέων* (in Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* 2.369), is *ἐπιεικεία*. This particular quality, 'restraint', the speaker shows chiefly by toning down his statements. Eustathius finds instances of this 'restraint' in *Odyssey* 8.214, 'Not at all weak am I in sports', instead of the statement, 'I am quite expert in sports', and in *Iliad* 1.28, 'lest staff and fillet of the god avail naught', instead of 'lest I injure you'.<sup>3</sup> Both passages are instances of *litotes*.

The specific Greek term for *litotes* is to be found in the last chapter of Hermogenes (Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, 2.456). There Hermogenes treats *ἀπόφασις τῇ καταφάσει*, 'affirmation by negation'. Three species of such affirmation are distinguished. First, the negation may mean exactly what the affirmation means. This is used, says Hermogenes, to avoid saying the same thing again in the same way. Modern rhetoricians style this device 'obverse iteration'. An example is 'We may not stand still; we must advance'. In the second place, the negation may mean less than the affirmation, as when, to be safe, we do not assert that something is bad, but say that it is not good. Courtesy often demands such cautiousness of statement. The third species of affirmation by negation intends more by the negation than the words in themselves signify. This is in reality *litotes*. Hermogenes gives as an example *Iliad* 15.11, 'For it was not the weakest of the Achaeans that had struck him'. Hermogenes cites also *Iliad* 1.330, the stock instance of the Byzantines. Lehnert has shown (in his *De Scholiis ad Homerum Rhetoricis*, *passim*) that Eustathius in his ample commentary on Homer makes use chiefly of Hermogenes. On *Odyssey* 8.214 Eustathius mentions *ἀπόφασις* explicitly; on *Odyssey* 4.200 he quotes *Iliad* 15.11, mentioned above, with the comment, τῷ

<sup>1</sup>This paper was read at the Twenty-second Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, held at Princeton University, May 17-18, 1928.

<sup>2</sup>This comes from Julius Rufinianus (see John Edwin Sandys's note to Cicero, *Orator* 137, page 141 [Cambridge: at the University Press, 1885]).

<sup>3</sup>See Lehnert, *De Scholiis ad Homerum Rhetoricis*, 47.

ἀποφατικῇ κατάφασιν δηλοῖ. Eustathius, therefore, follows Hermogenes.

Tryphon, Gregorius, and Cocondrius<sup>1</sup> call litotes ἀντίφασιν. All three quote Iliad 1.330, 'And seeing them Achilles was not glad'. Tryphon also quotes Iliad 15.11. These are the passages cited by Hermogenes. Pseudo-Plutarchus, De Homero 110, uses the term ἀντίφασιν for litotes, quoting Iliad 1.330. Antiphrasis, however, in the works of Byzantine rhetoricians designates usually euphemism and preterition, as also in Servius and in other Latin grammarians. Another group of Byzantines, Alexander, Zonaeus, and Anonymus<sup>2</sup>, use the term ἀντεναντίας for litotes. To illustrate, Alexander quotes Iliad 15.11. Modern dictionaries and rhetoricians have the term *enantiosis* for litotes. According to Lehrs, De Aristarchi Studiis Homericis, 12, the scholia of Aristonicus are taken from Aristarchus. This fact brings us to an earlier date for litotes than the date of Ad Herennium. The passages, however, show that Aristarchus, though he recognizes the figure, calling it ἐναντίον ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου and ἀντικείμενον, 'from opposites or contraries', uses the same terms in speaking of irony, and so does not seem to make litotes a distinct figure. The evidence, however, is meager here.

## II. THE DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF LITOTES

The term litotes is restricted almost universally in recent authors to negative statements. Definitions, however, of litotes are not always exact in modern Grammars. Allen and Greenough say (326, c), "A statement is often made emphatic by denying its contrary (*Litotes*, § 641) . . ."; Harkness (752, 8) writes, "Litotes denies something instead of affirming the opposite . . ." Such descriptions do not distinguish litotes from mere negation or from obverse iteration. Hale and Buck (632, 1) define litotes as "the rhetorical softening of an expression by the denial of the opposite idea . . ." In Gildersleeve-Lodge (700) we find, "Litotes, or Understatement, is the use of an expression by which more is meant than meets the ear. This is especially common with the negative . . ."

Most of the modern descriptions of litotes do not define it as well as it is defined by the critic who is recorded as first using the term. This was the Latin grammarian Donatus, early in the fourth century. The clear statement of Donatus may be found in his note on Terence, Hecyra 775. Professor Moore noted this explicit comment: Haec figura *litotes* dicitur, minus enim dicit quam significat, 'Litotes is a figure which says less than it means'. Donatus in this definition did not hold negation as essential to litotes. In the present paper, however, litotes is restricted to negation and is defined as that figure of speech in which what is said asserts more than is asserted by the opposite which it denies. For affirmative understatements I should recommend the use of the term *meiosis*, as when I say, "Someone will be sorry for this", meaning 'Very many will suffer much for this'.

<sup>1</sup>See Christian Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, 8.755, 773, 785 (Stuttgart, 1832-1836).

<sup>2</sup>See Walz (as cited in Note 3), 8.481, 689, 712.

The essential point in the restricted definition of litotes is found in the words, "asserts more than is asserted by the opposite". Compare Iliad 1.330. In the Lang-Leaf-Myers version no attempt is made to express the Greek particles, but the inversion may suggest the increased meaning of the opposite: "nor when he saw them was Achilles glad". The litotes might be made more evident by rendering, 'Achilles, on seeing them of all men <γε>, was, as you might expect <ἀρα>, not overjoyed'.

To understand clearly how litotes differs from simple negation and why it is a figure of speech consider the three kinds of negation referred to above, in the statement of Hermogenes's views. First, the negation may simply remove the term to which it is applied. When I say, "He is not glad", I mean either that he has not the feeling of gladness or that he is indifferent. In this case the word "not" takes away, and so the positive means less than the negative. Such a use of "not" is ordinary, not figurative. In the second kind of denial, called, commonly, 'obverse iteration', the positive means just as much as the negative. When I say, "He is sad, not glad", there is no difference in meaning between the two statements. Obverse iteration is common in Homer, especially where the positive statement precedes. Maximilian Lechner, *De Pleonasmis Homericis*, Pars III<sup>6</sup>, writes, Quid igitur contrarii negatione ad emphasin orationis est accommodatius? An dubitamus quin graviter velit loqui qui, enuntiata simpliciter digna re, negat insuper plane atque aperte rem ei contrariam?

Lechner finds such obverse iteration in Homer in nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, chiefly in speeches, and as evidences of heightened emotion. The verbs involved are classified as vigorous assertions of frankness, or of convinced opinion, or of exhortation to courage, or of other forms of vehement statement. Obverse iteration is found also by Lechner in the narrative parts of the poems, especially where a successful hit or doggedness in the fight is recounted. Most of Lechner's examples are of the type where the positive assertion precedes and the negative follows. In such a case the negative will ordinarily say the same as the positive, and there will be obverse iteration. This use of negation is not figurative, because the words are not used with a change of meaning.

There is, finally, the last and figurative use of negation, which is proper to litotes, where the negation says more than the positive. If I say, "He is not glad" and say it significantly, meaning 'He is extremely sad', that is litotes. Vossius (G. J. Vossius, *De Institutione Oratoria* 4.185 [Amsterdam, 1695]), calls litotes a species of synecdoche, a kind of part for the whole. Litotes in this sense is a real trope. The word affected by the negation is not taken in its usual sense. Litotes may be used ironically. It is often so used in Homer and elsewhere, but litotes is not always ironical. It is not ironical when Horace writes, *Carmina* 2.1.22, *non indecoro pulvere sordidos*, or when Bethlehem is

<sup>6</sup>Commentatio Adjecta Gymnasii Norimbergensis Novi Annalibus, 1890.



styled "not the least among the princes of Juda" (Matthew 2.6).

Lehnert, in his dissertation *De Scholiis ad Homerum Rhetoricis*, shows conclusively that Eustathius and the Homeric scholiasts in their rhetorical comments did not use Aristotle. Their chief source was Hermogenes. Eustathius, on Iliad 4.330, traces the origin of what we call litotes to the figure styled 'arsis and thesis', where there is negation followed by affirmation. On Iliad 7.198, 8.125, 9.125, 15.11 Eustathius has the same explanation. Now, according to Lehnert, Hermogenes was the first to give the name 'arsis and thesis' to this well-known method of amplification, which consists in giving the negative and then the positive. Hermogenes (Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, 2.328) mentions arsis and thesis under amplification (*περιβολή*), and says expressly that the negation by itself can supply the positive. Under the quality of beauty Hermogenes also mentions, as a figure of beauty, affirmation by two negations, 'not unwilling to fight', 'it is not obscure' (Spengel, 2.338). Here we have litotes. As Eustathius developed and applied the teaching of Hermogenes in other points, so did he here. Hermogenes's keen and methodical classifications furnished apt molds into which a writer might run his commentary. The school teachers of the Eastern Empire followed Hermogenes almost exclusively, and Hermogenes's exercises, coming into Europe at the Renaissance, through Aphthonius, flourished in the Schools for generations; they still survive.

The following passages will show how litotes is connected with arsis and thesis. In Iliad 16.474 we have the phrase *οὐδ' ἐμάτῃσσι*, 'nor did he dally', 'without delay', where the negative suggests the positive; in Iliad 23.509-510 the positive is given, *οὐδὲ μάτῃσιν ἰφθίμοι Σθένεος, ἀλλ' ἐσσυμένως λάβ' ἀέθλον*. In Iliad 18.59, 89, 440 there is the significant negative, 'Never again shall I welcome him <Achilles> back to his home'; the meaning is that he will be dead. In Iliad 18.331-332, the positive is supplied with the negative, 'Neither shall Peleus welcome me back home, nor my mother Thetis, but even here shall the earth keep hold on me'. In Iliad 1.354 we find the negative followed by the positive as a reason, with the omission of *ἀλλά*. This may be a transitional form. In Iliad 11.716 we have both negative and positive in a litotes which occurs repeatedly in the Iliad and the Odyssey: 'Nor were the men unwilling, but right eager for war'. So, when elsewhere we find *οὐκ ἀέκων*, the positive suggestion is likely to be *ἀλλὰ μάλ' ἐσσύμενοι*. Other passages might be adduced, but there can hardly be any doubt that litotes arose from the suppression of the positive assertion after the negative had prepared the mind for its statement.

### III. HOMERIC TYPES OF LITOTES

Even when litotes is restricted to negative statements which suggest an intensified positive, it is not always possible to be certain of the occurrence of the figure in print. To the spoken word the tone of the voice will give the added significance, as it does in irony. An ardent Irish student, when instructed by

his teacher to write an ironical paragraph, wrote a panegyric of England and added in a postscript, "This is irony". This is not a very satisfactory method of showing irony.

How does Homer indicate litotes? The most common way is to intensify the negation. If I say, "She is not beautiful", I may not wish to use litotes, but, should I say, "She is not at all beautiful", or "She has never been considered by anyone as exactly beautiful", it will be evident that litotes is intended. To generalize and to intensify his negation Homer makes use of *τι, ποτε, πῶς, ἔτι, ἄρα, τοι, γέ, μαν, θην, μάλα, πάμπαν, πᾶν*. According to J. Van Leeuwen (*Enchiridion Dictionis Epicae*, 412 [Leyden, 1918],) *θην* is 'without exception a particle of mockery'; this fact makes it suitable for use in instances of litotes. Homer also intensifies the denial by what we may call cumulative negation, as in Iliad 14.141, 'He has no wisdom, not even a grain'. The particle *περ* is often found in this type. Compare Iliad 14.344, 'Not even the sun might see through it, whose light is the keenest', Iliad 14.374, 'I fancy that Hector will not long await us, for all his eagerness'. Two words often used for strong assertion in litotes are *φημί* and *ὄλω*. Of *φημί* I have noted 23 instances in the Iliad.

In Augustus Gehring's *Index Homericus* (Leipzig, Teubner, 1891), there are 101 occurrences of *ὄλω, ὄλω* (as dissyllable only in Iliad), and *ὄλωμαι* in the first singular; in 61 of these instances there is litotes. In the 27 instances of *ὄλωμαι* outside of the first singular, only two are found with litotes, one in the first person plural. The particular figures for the first singular are, in the Odyssey 33 with litotes, 17 without, in the Iliad 28 with litotes, 23 without. Examples of litotes with *φημί* and *ὄλω* will be given later. It is significant that both these words are in the first singular; this fact proves that litotes is a figure proper to the spoken word (see below).

The Attic use of *ὄλωμαι* ironically is no doubt a survival of Homeric practice.

Pleonasm and intentional fullness of expression are a means of irony and are found often in litotes. In fact the form of expression called arsis and thesis, which gave rise to litotes, is in itself a species of pleonasm. The use of two synonyms is found in the scornful speech of Hector, Iliad 12.238, 'To birds I give no heed nor take any account of them'; in the same speech we have 'Thy heart is not enduring in battle nor warlike'. The cumulative negation already mentioned is also a case of pleonasm, and the same fullness of expression often brings together several emphatic particles with the other means of forceful expression, all in the same litotes. The river Scamander, speaking of Achilles, boastfully cries (Iliad 21.316), 'Neither, I ween <φημί>, will strength avail him, nor comeliness anyway, nor that armor beautiful'. In my notes I find forty instances of cumulative litotes in the Iliad.

Comparatives, not in the sense of 'more than', but in the sense of 'rather' and 'too', are used in the Homeric litotes. In a scholion on Iliad 12.458 Aristonicus says, 'The poet interprets the opposite from the opposite: that his missile might not be too weak <μὴ ἀφαιρό-

τερον>'. Comparatives are not numerous in litotes, because comparatives in their usual sense express explicitly and not figuratively the excess of the opposite.

Superlatives, because they are more forceful expressions, by their denial signify the positive more forcibly and are found more frequently than comparatives in the litotes of Homer. "I descry", says Milton (*Paradise Lost* 11.230), "one of the heavenly host and by his gait none of the meanest". The most quoted litotes after *Iliad* 1.330 is the superlative in *Iliad* 15.11. Ajax had struck down Hector. Homer says, 'It was not the weakest of the Achaeans that had smitten him'. Τὸ ἐναντίον ὑπακουστέον, ἀλλ' ἰσχυρότατος, says Aristonicus, who is quoting Aristarchus. In *Iliad* 16.570, 23.476, 477, 548 are other instances. In *Odyssey* 17.415 Odysseus says to Antinoos, 'Not the worst of the Achaeans do you seem to be, but the best', giving us the superlative on the way to litotes. There are two superlatives in two successive lines in the scornful speech of Ajax to Idomeneus (*Iliad* 23.476-477).

Compounds of alpha privative are very common in Homer with litotes. Hermogenes selects such double negatives as evidences of charm in language. Of the compounds containing alpha privative given in Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum*, I have counted more than fifty used in Homeric litotes. In the *De Corona* Demosthenes has fourteen instances of compounds containing alpha privative in litotes. Latin litotes is often found with the cognate prefix *in-*, as in Horace's *non indecoro pulvere sordidos* (*Carmina* 2.1.22). *Odyssey* 12.208, 'O friends, hitherto we are not unacquainted with evils', is the prototype of Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.198, *O socii, neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum*. In the twelve books of Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I find about twenty compounds of *un-* and *in-* used in litotes. Compare e. g. 1.442, said of Astarte, "in Sion also not unsung". I have noted 93 instances of litotes in *Paradise Lost*.

An interesting type of litotes is seen in the use of what might be called a standard, where a likeness to the best of a class is denied with an implication of the worst, as, "He is no Demosthenes". Geoffrey Farnol, in his novel, *The High Adventure*, 206, says, "You're not precisely a Methusaleh yourself". Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.717, says of the palace of the fallen angels, "Not Babylon nor great Alcairo such magnificence equalled". In *Iliad* 5.330 there is an example: 'Now Tydides had attacked Aphrodite with the pitiless bronze, knowing that she was a weakling <δυσλειτουργ> goddess and not one of those who master men in battle, no Athene she nor Enyo, sacker of cities'. The cheering, 'honey-sweet', words which Odysseus addressed to his companions (*Odyssey* 10.174) may be put here: 'Not yet, friends, however sad we may be, are we about to go down to the halls of Hades'. This is the prototype of our familiar litotes, 'Not dead yet'. In *Iliad* 17.398 we find the standard with cumulative negation with emphatic particles (γε, μάλα) and forceful word (δύσχεα), all used to characterize the critical contest over the dead body of Patroclus: 'Around them the fray waxed wild, nor might Ares,

rouser of hosts, nor Athene despise the sight of such a fight as that, not even if anger came to them intensely'.

The use of a strong and forceful word is another means of litotes akin to the use of a standard, of the superlative, and of compounds of alpha privative. Exaggeration is a sign of irony, and irony resembles litotes inasmuch as a word must be taken in an opposite sense. The more ironical Antony grows in his funeral speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the stronger is his statement that the slayers of Caesar are "honorable men". Milton (*Paradise Lost* 11.340) calls the rule over the earth bestowed on man "no despicable gift". Our common litotes, 'That's no lie', appears as early as *Iliad* 9.115, *οὐ τι ψεύδοι*, where Agamemnon admits that Nestor has most truthfully recounted his follies. Achilles is described, in *Iliad* 20.467, as 'not at all soft of heart or tender'. But, as Homer adds the positive here, clearer instances are to be found in *Iliad* 21.462, where Apollo says to Poseidon, 'Of no sound mind <σαφῶς> would you repute me if I should fight against you', and in *Iliad* 24.739, where Andromache cries to Astyanax, with the pride of a soldier's wife, 'Not honey-sweet <μέλιχος> was your father in the fight'; Lang, Leaf, and Myers render this by "No light hand had thy father". Words like *καλός*, *κακός*, *φίλος*, *κόσμος*, which in later Greek are often used ironically and in litotes, were first so used in Homer. Words found often in litotes are *νέμεσις* and *νέμεσάω* (eleven instances in the *Iliad*), *ἐθέλω* (nineteen instances in the *Iliad*), *μέλλω* (ten instances in the *Iliad*), *χραιομέω* (seventeen instances in the *Iliad*), *ἐλπομαι* and *κομιδή*, often. For the last word see *Odyssey* 8.232, 453, 24.247, 249, 251. The verbs *δοῖμαι* and *δομαι*, which are found almost always with negatives or in rhetorical questions implying a negative, occur frequently in litotes, and are resorted to in certain telling passages, as in *Iliad* 17.398 in the fight over Patroclus, and in *Odyssey* 5.379, where Poseidon finally ceases his attacks on Odysseus: 'But even so <i. e. though you are not slain> I expect that you will not make light of the evil'. The verb *δοῖμαι* is used in *Iliad* 4.539, in a summing-up of the fight, 'Now would none any more on entering in make light of the battle'.

(To be concluded)

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY,  
NEW YORK CITY

FRANCIS P. DONNELLY, S. J.

## REVIEW

Light from the Ancient East. The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World. By Adolf Deissmann. Translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan. New and Completely Revised [Fourth] Edition. New York: George H. Doran Company [1927]. Pp. xxxii + 535.

Professor Adolf Deissmann's book, *Light from the Ancient East*, is, surely, one of the most felicitous of all the works which seek to popularize the life of the classical world. It is the product of a scholar whose life work is the enthusiastic reinterpretation of newly discovered texts in their relation to the life depicted

in the New Testament. Although it is designed primarily for the student of early Church history, its appeal is remarkably general, and, as a result of the author's intimate command of sources and his unusual power of bringing together apposite ideas, it has made itself essential to every classical student's library. Professor Deissmann to an unusual degree combines sound and accurate knowledge of detail with a gift for facile presentation. The book, he says (x),

... was the outcome of my own strongly developed general sense of form, and further of the conviction that the literature of learning, if it is going to be literature and not a labyrinth of parentheses, a chaos of snippets, and a pasting together of paper slips, must aim at artistic forms of its own. Though assigned myself to the literary class, I have certainly a great weakness for the non-literary and no small delight in the merely literary man's unconscious irony of himself. But that does not prevent me from wishing to be seriously literary in literary things.

The contents of the volume are as follows:

I. The Problem—Discovery and Nature of the New Texts (1-61); II. The Language of the New Testament Illustrated from the New Texts (62-145); III. The New Testament as Literature, Illustrated by the New Texts (146-251); IV. Social and Religious History in the New Testament, Illustrated from the New Texts (252-392); V. Retrospect—Future Work of Research (393-409); Appendices I-XI (413-467); Indices I-VI (469-535).

The most striking feature of this work is its fullness of documentation. Everywhere the sources are given, not merely in translation, but with very full critical notes<sup>1</sup>, and, where necessary, with textual revision<sup>2</sup>. Particular pains have been taken to place a photograph, where one is given, on the page facing the original text.

To this wealth of source material is added a vivid interpretation of detail<sup>3</sup>. The skill with which Professor Deissmann reconstructs the background of ancient life is all the more striking for one curious lapse (176-178), in which he compares Irene's famous letter of consolation<sup>4</sup> with the form-letter given as a model by the epistolographer Proclus. If there is any reason at all for bringing these two documents together, surely it must be to point out how *different* is the stilted elegance of the latter from the simple sincerity of the former. To his command of detail Professor Deissmann adds the power of brilliant generalization. His application of our knowledge of ancient papyrus letters to the literary style of St. Paul and the development of literature in the Christian Church (227-251) is an admirable introduction to the psychology of the early Christian centuries. No better summary of the unique light thrown upon ancient documents by papyrus and epigraphical documents could be asked or than the simple statement (250) of the author:

<sup>1</sup>Sometimes, indeed, the length of these notes makes them unmanageable, and they overflow pages in a needlessly cumbersome fashion. See e. g. pages 14-20. A rather extreme case occurs on page 182, which contains the footnotes to pages 179 and 180.

<sup>2</sup>So his edition (253-263) of part of a magic papyrus amounts almost to a reconstitution of the text. In several places I am disposed to disagree with the details.

<sup>3</sup>For a good example, see the popular but entirely sound exposition of a third century papyrus letter (165-166). See also the instances on pages 186, 195-197.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus papyri*, Part I, No. CXV, pages 181-182 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898).

... I am bound to say that I had never grasped those main lines of the literary development of Christianity until I took up the study of the class of document we have been considering. Then it was that the great difference between literary and non-literary writing impressed itself on me, and I learnt from the papyrus letters to appreciate the characteristics of the non-literary letter.

From that time onward the literary history of Primitive Christianity stood out before me in all its grandeur.

In many ways the core of the book is Chapter IV, pages 252-392 (on social and religious history). This discussion will be as valuable to students of the classical world as to those chiefly interested in early Christianity.

The illustrations, eighty-five in all, testify throughout to the author's anxiety to be helpful, clear, and accurate. The same may be said of the eleven Appendices—six of which appeared originally as articles or reviews—on various special points. The Indices are, as may be expected, exemplary. They are grouped under six heads: I. Places (469-475); II. Ancient Persons (476-484); III. Words and Phrases (485-491); IV. Subjects (492-509); V. Modern Persons (510-521); VI. Passages Cited (522-535).

In so large and detailed a volume as this it would be impossible not to find points of disagreement. The very vividness with which Professor Deissmann interprets his documents leads him once or twice to assume more exact correspondences between archaeological data and New Testament documents than the facts warrant. It is rather extravagant, for example, to assume (page 16, note 7) that, because the lettering on the "synagogue of the Hebrews" in Corinth may be dated between 100 B. C. and 200 A. D.,

it is therefore a possibility seriously to be reckoned with that we have here the inscription to the door of the Corinthian synagogue mentioned in Acts xviii. 4, in which St. Paul first preached!

Objection also may be taken to the rather pugnacious attitude toward the old-school theologians who resented the newer interpretation of the papyri. Much of this *ira theologica* is amusing<sup>5</sup>; all of it is obsolete. Thus it seems unnecessary to prove at such extreme length (74-104) the secular origin of the New Testament language. The need for polemics has passed, and I suspect that the argument is included merely because the editor is loath to discard a mass of carefully gathered (and, one must confess, interesting) material. Of omissions in the admirable bibliographies there are relatively few. To the long note on the Christian *libelli* (46, note 2) might well have been added a reference to J. R. Knipfing, *The Libelli of the Decian Persecution*<sup>6</sup>. The suggestion that someone compile the prices of grain during the second half of the first century A. D. implies ignorance of the article by Louis C. West, *The Cost of Living in Roman Egypt*<sup>7</sup>. The inscription dealing with the dispute between Hierapytna and Itanus (page 106) is now dated, not in

<sup>5</sup>E.g. his sarcastic comment (201) on the letter of Theon to his father: "The style I recommend to the consideration of all who are specialists in detecting the stylistic features characteristic of the Semitic race".

<sup>6</sup>The Harvard Theological Review 16 (1925), 345-390.

<sup>7</sup>Classical Philology 11 (1916), 293-314.



138 or 132 B. C., but in 112 B. C.<sup>8</sup> But these are, to be sure, minor details. The only serious neglect is the fact that no mention is made of the Wörterbuch of Friedrich Preisigke (a dictionary to the Greek papyri), which appeared in ample time for use in Professor Deissman's work.

No review of this work would be complete without mention of the remarkable translation by Lionel R. M. Strachan. Perhaps "translation" is not the best title. Mr. Strachan is, rather, the English collaborator of Professor Deissmann. His English is beautifully finished and so idiomatic that one is not at all aware that the book is a translation. More important than this, however, is the meticulous accuracy with which Mr. Strachan endeavors at every point to supplement or to bring up to date Professor Deissmann's information<sup>9</sup>, to explain allusions which might in any way be puzzling<sup>10</sup>, to add the text of Greek passages where these have been omitted (e. g. 58), not infrequently to enter objections to Professor Deissmann's conclusions<sup>11</sup>, and, finally, even to explain Professor Deissmann's motives when Professor Deissmann does not take the trouble to do this for himself (e. g. 144).

It seems a pity that the author and the translator use the archaic Biblical dialect in their version of the papyrus documents. This may be natural enough where the pieces are of theological interest, but it is my conviction that, in general, papyrus documents, if they are translated at all, should be put into current, if not colloquial, idiom, so as to preserve the directness of the originals. Biblical English is now *unnatural*, and the papyrus documents are rarely that. Moreover, in many cases the use of this idiom makes unnecessarily obscure what is clearer in the original. So, for example, in the letter, Amherst Papyri I 3a, Professor Deissmann's translation (pages 209-210) really approaches unintelligibility.

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CASPER J. KRAEMER, JR.

#### CICERO, IN CATILINAM 1.16

... Quotiens iam tibi extorta est ista sica de manibus, quotiens excidit casu aliquo et elapsa est! Quae quidem quibus abs te initiata sacris ac devota sit nescio, quod eam necesse putas esse in consulis corpore defigere.

Conspiracy seems to require a conventional stage-setting, such as a midnight meeting<sup>1</sup>, a blood cove-

<sup>8</sup>By M. Cary, *A Roman Arbitration of the Second Century B. C.* (*Journal of Roman Studies* 16 [1926], 194-200).

<sup>9</sup>Everywhere there are references to parallel English material, e. g. on page 123, and pages 280-281 (here there is an extended treatment of the Zeus-Hermes dedication of Sedasa, illustrated by a Plate).

<sup>10</sup>E. g. page 46, note 1, where the word *libelli* is carefully defined, or page 381, where Professor Deissmann's references to "the herdsman of Tekoa, the shoemaker of Górlitz, and the ribbon-weaver of Mulheim" are dryly unraveled.

<sup>11</sup>E. g. 123, note 1, 151, note 5, 176, note 4. In one place at least the objection seems to be in error: on page 92 Mr. Strachan explains on the analogy of the "ignorantia litterarum" of eighth-century manuscripts that the phrase "because I cannot write", which occurs frequently in the papyri, does not really prove illiteracy. A historian could afford mock modesty in claiming his ignorance of the art of writing: the average Egyptian peasant, however, who made this claim, and who hired a scribe to write for him, almost certainly was analphabet.

<sup>1</sup>Cicero, *In Catilinam* 1. 8; Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 20. 1; Pliny, *Epistulae* 10. 106. 7.

nant<sup>2</sup>, or the like. The passage quoted above is interesting for its reference to the use of a consecrated dagger held in readiness for the chief victim.

There is an interesting parallel in the account of the conspiracy headed by Piso to put Nero out of the way. A certain Scaevinus wanted to strike the deadly blow. Of his preparations Tacitus writes as follows (*Annales* 15. 53. 3):

... primas sibi partes expostulante Scaevino, qui pugionem templo Salutis, sive, ut alii tradidere, Fortunae Ferentino in oppido detraxerat gestabatque velut magno operi sacrum....

It is a rather striking coincidence that, when he was betrayed, Scaevinus offered the same kind of explanation as did Cethegus in regard to the arsenal found at his house<sup>3</sup>, namely that this particular dagger was a treasured heirloom (*Annales* 15. 55. 3):

... ferrum cuius argueretur olim religione patria cultum et in cubiculo habitum ac fraude liberti subreptum respondit....<sup>4</sup>

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H. C. NUTTING.

#### ONCE MORE THE ORIGINALITY OF LATIN AUTHORS

IN THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 21.191, under the caption Roman Poets and Plagiarism, I quoted a passage in which James Russell Lowell discussed the originality of Chaucer; I asked the reader to apply the passage, *mutatis mutandis*, to Vergil, Horace, etc.

I quote now a passage from a review, by Professor John M. Manly, in *The School Review* 16 (1908), 59-61, of Robert K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to its Study and Appreciation*.

A somewhat similar dissatisfaction may be felt with Dr. Root's discussion of Chaucer's character and mental qualities. His Chaucer is such a person as one reads about in books, not such as one meets in life. There is here again too much intellectual inertia, too much echoing of current formulae, too little effort to see the facts as they really are, to give them body and form and local habitation instead of a mere verbal tag. This is especially noticeable in the remarks concerning Chaucer's religious views, in those concerning his aloofness from the world, in those concerning his metrical range. As of equal interest with these we may note the discussion of Chaucer's originality and anachronisms in his art. In both these instances Dr. Root seems on the point of giving us the truth. In regard to the latter he tells us that, if Chaucer indulges in anachronisms—"shocking anachronisms", he calls them—so does Shakespeare. So he does, and so does Tennyson, and so does Browning; so to a greater or less degree does every artist who deals with the past. The question

<sup>2</sup>Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 22. 1; Pliny, *Epistulae* 10. 106. 7, ad finem.

<sup>3</sup>Cicero, *In Catilinam* 3. 10.

<sup>4</sup>I have long been interested in an important point connected with the passage discussed here by Professor Nutting. This point, the logical bearing of the clause *quod... defigere*, is seldom if ever, discussed by the editors. Yet it troubles intelligent pupils (the only sort who are ever really troubled by a Latin passage), and has, I know, troubled many teachers.

The clause has, of course, no logical relation to the words *quae quidem... nescio*. It gives the reason or justification for a thought to which, though he had it vividly in mind, Cicero gives no expression in words. That thought would be expressed in English by 'but consecrated it surely was', or, more fully and more clearly, 'that it was consecrated I flatly affirm'. In Latin we might have *sed consecrata sane est*, or *consecratam sane eam esse affirmo*. Cicero might also have written *quae quidem abs te sacris nescio quibus ac devota, quod, etc., or quam quidem abs te sacris nescio quibus ac devotam affirmo, quod, etc.* C. K. >



is altogether one of degree, and the amount and the kind of anachronism allowable—nay necessary and desirable—depends upon the antiquarian knowledge of the artist's audience and upon nothing else. The artist's concern is to convey to his audience his thought and feeling. He has just as little right to shock them by introducing elements historically true but requiring an antiquarian explanation or justification as to shock them by elements known and felt to be historically false. The principle is the same as that so profoundly enunciated by Wordsworth concerning the limitations under which poetry may deal with the scientific facts, and rests upon the same psychological basis. "The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective Sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings". Nothing is available for poetry that is not either familiar or capable of being immediately seized and harmonized by the imagination.

In discussing Chaucer's originality, Dr. Root seems almost on the point of exploding forever the foolish current idea that because we can point out where Chaucer and Shakespeare got some of their raw materials, they need some defense on the score of originality, as compared with modern writers who get their materials mainly from untraceable sources in literature or life. In the sense implied by this current foolish idea it is probable that originality cannot be claimed for any writer that ever lived. The sole question that can properly be asked in determining originality of a work of art is, *Did the artist make a new thing of his materials.* Whether the change required one stroke of pen or brush or chisel or a thousand is of no consequence: the result is all.

The italics in the foregoing passage are mine. Professor Manly's remarks here about 'anachronisms' and about originality should be taken to heart by every student of Vergil.

In 1910 the American Book Company brought out a volume by Morris Hickey Morgan, of Harvard University (see THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 4:41-42). Every student of the Classics ought to possess and cherish this volume; it is full of sound sense (I am afraid that the publishers have no copies of it). The first two papers, *The Student of the Classics* (5-33), *The Teachers of the Classics* (34-61), are especially valuable.

On pages 16-18 this passage is to be found:

But enough of Livy for the present. I have shown, I hope, by this example that we must learn to know the ancient writers by living with them, not by getting our knowledge of them from lectures or from histories of literature. It is only through constant association with a writer that one can get a true conception of what his work is as a human document; only this enables one to utter such final verdicts as, for instance, that of Tennyson on Pindar, when he says: 'Pindar is a kind of Australian poet; that is, he has long tracts of gravel with immensely large nuggets of gold imbedded therein.' Or again, when of Virgil he says: 'People accuse Virgil of plagiarizing, but if a man made it his own, there was no harm in that. Look at the other great poets, Shakespeare included.' Here we have an extremely pithy and acute remark by one who had, I suppose, a truer appreciation of the greatness of Virgil as a poet than anybody <else> who has ever lived since Dante. It really says in two dozen words, if you know how to interpret them, all that is to be found

in the two dozen pages devoted to this point by a recent writer of *Studies in Virgil* <T. R. Glover>. The fact is, as Mr. Glover puts it, that we are not much helped to a real judgment on Virgil by the information that he took certain words or verses or episodes from this or that earlier poet. Rather should we ask ourselves: how far did this or that earlier poet influence the *mind* of Virgil? More, for instance, than North's Plutarch influenced the mind of Shakespeare? Was the poet's outlook on life affected? Was his habitual mode of expressing himself turned into nothing but repetition of the thought and the language of others? When such is the issue of literary influence, we can see what Carlyle meant when he spoke of imitation as the deadliest of poetical sins. But when this is not the issue, as Mr. Glover shows that it was not in the case of Virgil, then we realize the truth of Goethe's dictum that 'to make an epoch in the world two conditions are essential,—a good head and a good inheritance.' It was because Virgil had associated so intimately and so long with the greatest minds of the past that he was able to assimilate what was best in their minds with the original genius of his own, and so to produce a poem which, more than all the rest of Latin literature, has influenced the succeeding literature which is our inheritance. And it is ours to use. Therefore, do not neglect to use it.

CHARLES KNAPP

#### ACTUS VERGILIANUS

On Sunday afternoon, November 17, the Vergilian Bimillennial Celebration began at the Jesuit House of Classical Studies, Saint Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, New York, when the members of the graduating class afforded a most delightful exhibition for classical enjoyment to the entire Jesuit student body, the faculty, and the many invited guests, by presenting in the College Auditorium an Actus Vergilianus, or a Defense of the Vergilian Poems. The programme opened with the singing in Latin, by the Choir of the graduating class, of Thomas Moore's well-known poem, *Oft in The Stilly Night*. The Latin translation was made by some of the students.

Next in order Mr. Philip V. Sullivan delivered, in Latin, Aeneas's Speech to Dido, Queen of Carthage, in which Vergil describes the finding by the Trojans of the Wooden Horse left by the Greeks on the shores of Troy. Mr. Sullivan's exquisite interpretation of this famous passage won prolonged applause from the very appreciative audience.

Mr. James J. Ball then read a most interesting and splendidly written essay on Vergil, the Artist in Words. He drew special attention to the Mantuan poet's artistic skill in visualization and picturization, both of scenes and of persons.

In the Actus Vergilianus, which followed, Mr. Charles G. McManus presented the *Bucolics*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*, for translation, historical exposition, literary appreciation and critical analysis. Four other members of the graduating class in turn presented objections of varied kinds based on historical, literary, and critical principles. Those proposing objections were Messrs. John V. Flynn, William F. Maloney, William F. Masterson, and James J. Shanahan.

After this the invited guests and members of the faculty proposed difficulties to Mr. McManus. For two hours the classic disputation waxed eloquent, and a lively interchange of objections and answers, interspersed with witty and humorous sallies, kept the large audience intensely interested.

At the conclusion of the program the audience sang the Star Spangled Banner, in Latin; the Latin translation was done by one of the Jesuits.

ALOYSIUS J. HOGAN, S. J., Dean

### THE CLASSICAL CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA

The 206th meeting of The Classical Club of Philadelphia was held at the Princeton Club on Friday, December 6, with thirty-six members present. In the paper of the evening, entitled Greek Science, Professor Walter Woodburn Hyde, of the University of Pennsylvania, reviewed the scientific achievements of the Greeks from Thales to Galen, showing the remarkable anticipations of modern scientific thought, doctrine and accomplishment. The fact was brought out that the achievements of the Greeks in literature, philosophy, architecture, and art were so astonishing that modern attention has been fixed on these to the exclusion of any common knowledge of their really great scientific attainment.

The 207th meeting was held at the Princeton Club on Friday evening, January 3, with thirty-two members present. Professor William N. Bates, of the University of Pennsylvania, read a paper on the poem by Quintus of Smyrna, a continuation of the story of the Iliad. A brief synopsis of the poem was given, and on the critical side the reader stated his high opinion of the content, style, language, and verse of the poem. It is marvellous, he said, that a writer of the fourth century A. D. should be able so to steep himself in the life and the language of the Homeric age as practically to reproduce them in his poem.

The 208th meeting was held on Friday, February 7, with 27 members present.

It was unanimously voted that a special meeting be held on Wednesday, October 15, in celebration of the birthday of Vergil and that a committee be appointed to arrange a programme. The paper of the evening, entitled Schiller and Vergil, was read by Mr. E. S. Gerhard, of the Northeast High School. The life and training of Schiller were discussed, and it was shown by readings from his poems and his dramas how deeply the great German was imbued with the classical, and especially with the Vergilian, spirit.

B. W. MITCHELL, *Secretary*

### COMING TO AN ISLAND ON FOOT

In his illuminating paper on Humor in Homer and in Vergil, THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 22.169-172, 177-181, Professor J. W. Hewitt seems to hesitate (180) whether or not to accept as true Homeric jesting the oft cited passage of the Odyssey, 'for I do not suppose that you came here on foot' (1.173, 14.190, 16.59, 224), said of the traveller's arrival at Ithaca.

It is true that Dr. Dörpfeld interprets the line as seriously to-day (Alt-Ithaca 1.83-84) as he did a generation ago. But with all reverence for one of the world's greatest scholars, may it not be said that this very seriousness has created an inexhaustible source of merriment for the supporters of the traditional view of the Ithacan question? In any case, the rejection of the passage as a topographical suggestion in no way destroys the Leucas-Ithaca equation, though its acceptance as such would undoubtedly work havoc with any other theory of identification.

Professor John A. Scott has recently (The Classical Journal 23.703-704) reached the following conclusion

<'On the Ithacan question see THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 22.155, 202-203. C. K.>.

regarding the semantics of *πόδες*: "The word in Homer has a vague meaning, a meaning closely akin to 'unassisted' or 'unaccompanied by others' ". . . This is surely hard doctrine, one may say, in the face of the many contrasts definitely marked by Homer, through this word, between fighting or travelling by horse and chariot and on the ground, and between journeying by sea or by ship and by land. Of the two passages on which Professor Scott's conclusion is mainly based, one (Odyssey 11.157-159) was rejected by Aristarchus and appears hopelessly out of place. The other (13.58), wherein Odysseus remarks in amazement to the dead Elpenor, 'You coming on foot have outstripped me in my black ship', is more apposite. Undoubtedly Elpenor had to cross the same water as Odysseus, unless one is to understand a very complicated system of psychopompia. But the point loses its force when we recall that Greek vase-paintings not infrequently represent the disembodied dead as running at full speed through the air (as in Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, Great Britain, 4, Plate 36). The conception in the mind of the painter may well be as old as the Hellenic peoples themselves.

It is difficult for one who has spent much of his youth in the country to regard 'for I do not suppose that you came here on foot' as anything other than a rustic joke, one indeed characteristically so. Jibes of the following sort are typical of rural society. A caller who reaches a house on a very wet day is asked, 'How did you get here? Did you swim?' On a slippery day in winter he hears the question, 'Did you come on skates all the way?' I have heard a countryman say that he crossed a river or even went to an island 'walking' or 'driving'. The questions and replies have in them that primitive element of absurdity that always wins a laugh. It is a type of humor too childish to attract the writers of rural fiction.

Sir Rennell Rodd (Homer's Ithaca, 58) cites a modern parallel among the descendants of the ancient Greeks in the Island of Capri who on several occasions asked the Russian scholar Stepanow whence he had come and added: "Perché non e mica venuto per terra". The simpler the human elements are in Homer, the less subject do we find them to change.

ALFRED UNIVERSITY

A. D. FRASER

### ONE ANCIENT ATTEMPT AT CENSORSHIP

In view of present-day efforts at censoring literature and art, an ancient instance of the recognition of the advertising value of censorship may be of interest. Dio tells us (57.24) that in 25 A. D. Sejanus forced Cremutius Cordus to commit suicide by bringing him to trial for his history of the achievements of Augustus, in which he had praised Cassius and Brutus. The passage, as translated by Dr. Earnest Cary (The Loeb Classical Library), runs as follows: "... This was the complaint made against him, and this it was that caused his death as well as the burning of his writings; those found in the city at the time were destroyed by the aediles, and those elsewhere by the magistrates of each place. Later they were republished, for his daughter Marcia as well as others had hidden some copies; and they aroused much greater interest by very reason of Cordus' unhappy fate..."

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